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**‘Law and Gospel’ or ‘Gospel and Law’?
An attempt to Trans(form) *Theologia Viatorum* in the Living Church**

Irene Ludji

Fakultas Teologi, Universitas Kristen Satya Wacana

irene.ludji@uksw.edu

Abstract

This article explores the ordered concepts of ‘Law and Gospel’ by Martin Luther and ‘Gospel and Law’ by Karl Barth. On the one hand, Luther understood Law and the Gospel as two different but not separate concepts of Christian life. The Law is what God asks Christians to do, while the Gospel is what Christians receive from God. On the other hand, Barth believes that theology should focus on the incarnation of Jesus Christ as proclaimed in the Gospel. This article answered two research questions: First, what is the relationship between the approach presented by Luther and Barth? Second, how can these approaches contribute to the attempt to trans(form) *theologia viatorum* in the living church? This study was conducted by a literature study. The result of the study showed that to transform and form *theologia viatorum* of the living church, the ability to hold hand in hand (*manus in manu*) the duty to God (Law), as proposed by Luther, and receiving the good news (Gospel), as suggested by Barth should enable the church to serve the world better.

Keywords: incarnation; Karl Barth; living church; Martin Luther; Word of God

INTRODUCTION

Churches in the world today face the challenge of rising secularism. One of these churches, such as the United States (U.S.), as the biggest Christian populated country in the world, are also facing a changing landscape inside and outside the church with the rising number of the ‘nones’ -those who did not affiliate with any religious group. “The percentage of Americans identifying as Christian dropped from 78% in 2007 to 71% in 2014. By contrast, the religiously unaffiliated have surged seven percentage points in that time span to make up 23% of U.S. adults.”¹ The new generation of Millennials plays a significant role in this change. “The rise of the ‘nones’ is not a story unique to the U.S; the unaffiliated are now the second-largest religious group in 48% of the world’s nations.”²

The rise of the unaffiliated does not mean that secularism is an obstacle for the church. Instead, this means that the church needs to take secularism seriously and appropriately from the theological perspective.

In facing secularism, the church must be re-formed in the way they think of their function in the world. The church is called to follow God’s commands in the world through the development of *theologia viatorum* - the theology of the pilgrimage, which is living in this changing landscape of the world.

There are many publications on the topic of Law and Gospel from Martin Luther and the concept of Gospel and Law from Karl Barth. First, Ramathate T. Dolamo in “The Continued Debate on Law and Gospel Among Selected Lutheran Scholars within the Change Agency Paradigm” discuss Luther’s 95 theses on the Wittenberg chapel door in its relation to the theme of Law and Gospel.³ Second, James Alfred Loader in “Law and Gospel in Pentateuch Organisation” explore the interrelationship between Gospel and Law throughout Pentateuch.⁴ Third, Marcin Sienkowski in analyze the application of Gospel using the law of thinking.⁵

Other publications that discuss the topic of Law and Gospel is presented by Anton Vladimirovich that focus on the use

¹ D’Vera Cohn and Andrea Caumont, “10 Demographic Trends That Are Shaping the U.S. and the World,” Pew Research Center, 2016, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2016/03/31/10-demographic-trends-that-are-shaping-the-u-s-and-the-world/>.

² Cohn and Caumont.

³ Ramathate T. Dolamo, “The Continued Debate on Law and Gospel among Selected Lutheran Scholars within the Change Agency Paradigm,” *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 74, no. 3 (November

12, 2018): 1–8, <https://doi.org/10.4102/HTS.V74I3.5219>.

⁴ James Alfred Loader, “‘Law and Gospel’ in the Pentateuch Organisation,” *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 57, no. 1/2 (December 14, 2001): 70–85, <https://doi.org/10.4102/HTS.V57I1/2.1844>.

⁵ Marcin Sieńkowski, “Laws of Logical Thinking and the Gospel,” *Civitas et Lex* 26, no. 2 (October 3, 2020): 85–94, <https://doi.org/10.31648/CETL.5298>.

of process theology in understanding Luther's Law and Gospel;⁶ Raymond Potgieter analyze the complexity of Christian life in relation to moral duty and virtues presented by Luther;⁷ Francois D Tolmie present hermeneutics on the Letter of Philemon using Luther and Calvin's explanation on the message of the Gospel;⁸ and Rothney S Tshaka connected Gospel and Law in the context of the confessing church in the midst of war.⁹ There are also publications that focus on critiquing Luther and Barth's approaches including the publication from Bart Eriksson and Ernest van Eck who explore challenges to Luther's idea of Gospel and Law;¹⁰ and J Michaelson who discussed Barth's ideas using Schleiermacher's perspective.¹¹

In comparison to publications mentioned above, this article adds an important analysis into the discussion because in it, I explore the concept of Law and Gospel

from Martin Luther and the concept of Gospel and Law from Karl Barth to analyze the important role of the living church and its mission in the world. Luther's approach in Law and Gospel is a reasonable and systematic attempt that can be used in facing the problems in the world. Acceptance of Luther's approach does not mean that Barth's Gospel and Law are to have no function in facing the struggles of the church. The goal of this article is to argue that the ability to hold both ideas (*manus in manu*) 'Law and Gospel' with 'Gospel and Law,' as two traditions of thinking that can be differentiated but should not be separated from each other is the key for the church to reform the ethics of the mission of the church. The ability to differentiate between Law and Gospel is necessary for the church to be functional in the middle of the struggling world since it opens up room for human beings to acknowledge the presence of God.

⁶ Anton Vladimirovich Tihomirov, "Oscillations of Love. Relationship of Law and Gospel in the Context of the Theology of the Process (on the Example of the Theology of Katherine Keller)," *Religiya. Tserkov'. Obshchestvo. Issledovaniya i Publikatsii Po Teologii i Religii [Religion. Church. Society: Research and Publications in the Field of Theology and Religious Studies]* 7 (2018): 18–43, <https://doi.org/10.24411/2308-0698-2018-00002>.

⁷ Raymond Potgieter, "Martin Luther and Aesop: Fables as Tales of Morality for Today?," *In Die Skriflig/In Luce Verbi* 57, no. 1 (February 6, 2023): 8, <https://doi.org/10.4102/IDS.V57I1.2896>.

⁸ D. Francois Tolmie, "God, Christ and the Spirit in Luther and Calvin's Commentaries on the Letter to Philemon," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 43, no. 1 (November 3, 2022): 1–7, <https://doi.org/10.4102/VE.V43I1.2663>.

⁹ Rothney S Tshaka, "A Confessing Church at War with Itself: The Significance of the Relationship between the Concepts 'Gospel and Law,'" *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* 1, no. 2 (January 22, 2015): 683–93, <https://doi.org/10.17570/STJ.2015.V1N2.A32>.

¹⁰ Bart Eriksson and Ernest van Eck, "The New Perspective Challenge to Luther," *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 75, no. 4 (2019): 1–9, <https://doi.org/10.4102/HTS.V75I4.5244>.

¹¹ Jared Michelson, "A Barthian Critique of Schleiermacher's Doctrine of God: Questioning the Schleiermacher Renaissance," *Pro Ecclesia: A Journal of Catholic and Evangelical Theology* 30, no. 4 (July 25, 2021): 484–515, <https://doi.org/10.1177/10638512211033615>.

This claim is also not to say that the Jesus Christ that a Christian meets through the Gospel is no longer important. In fact, Christ is the reason behind the need for differentiation between Law and Gospel. Furthermore, the understanding of dogmatics as ethics proposed by Barth should be seen as a possible and needed act in the middle of the church that is working on their *theologia viatorum*. The ability to differentiate between what God is telling us to do as an ethical responsibility, and what God has given to us through Christ without separating the two is as crucial as the ability to understand the difference between ‘Law and Gospel’ and ‘Gospel and Law’ in the development of the church’s mission. This ability will enable the church to serve those who are in needs, who are suffering, and who are experiencing injustice.

RESEARCH METHOD

This article uses literature study as research method. This method is used in order to analyze main writings provided by Luther and Barth on the topic of Law and Gospel while including the existing research on the topic in order to contribute academically.¹² Literature study as a method is used

by elaborating the background, including the definition, concepts, and extensive analysis of Law and Gospel from Luther and Gospel and Law from Barth.¹³ Within the research and writing of this article, materials have been chosen selectively to describe and analyze the proposed context. The topic of Law and Gospel are discussed comprehensively to understand the position of each approach to forming the living church. It is of utmost importance to understand the position of Law and the Gospel within the church and how this knowledge can strengthen the ethical duty of the church in the world today. Hence, discussing the concepts of Law and Gospel from Luther and Gospel and Law from Barth in this article is essential to contextualize the church's role in today's world. Both approaches proposed by Luther and Barth can be used to optimize the understanding of the church's role in a world full of illness, pain, violence, and hate.

There are four parts to this article. In the first part, I will discuss the ordered concepts of ‘Law and Gospel’ from Martin Luther. I will explore ‘Gospel and Law’ by Karl Barth in the second part. In the third part, I will present the relation between the approach presented by Luther and Barth on

¹² Jeffrey W. Knopf, “Doing a Literature Review,” *PS: Political Science & Politics* 39, no. 1 (January 2006): 127–32, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096506060264>.

¹³ Susanne Hempel, *Conducting Your Literature Review Concise Guides to Conducting Behavioral, Health, and Social Science Research Series, Illustrated* (America: American Psychological Association, 2020), 116.

Law and Gospel. In the last part, I will explore the theology of the living church.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Luther: Law and Gospel

Luther understands Law and Gospel as two different but not separated entities in the Christian life.¹⁴ The Law is what God is asking believers to do, while the Gospel is what believers receive from God. The church must understand the different functions of the Law and Gospel to be the living church that serves the world. Both the Law and Gospel plays significant roles in the church that wants to be the helper in and for the community of God. Luther states that “salvation comes through faith in the Gospel ... not through works of the Law.”¹⁵ Therefore, by looking at Law and Gospel as two different concepts that cannot be separated, Luther wanted to put the Law into the perspective of theology, making the concepts exclusively a theological concept. Law being the imperative of what one must do while Gospel being the grace of God that one must receive.

From the history of Reformation by Luther, it is clear that Luther started with Gospel when he critiqued the church’s ca-

non Law and clerical authority. In the development of this Reformation, Luther learned that Law is needed by the church to able to reach the world systematically. In time, “the Lutheran reformation of theology and the church quickly broadened into a reformation of Law and the state as well. Deconstruction of the canon Law for the sake of the Gospel gave way to reconstruction of the civil Law on the strength of the Gospel.”¹⁶ To repeat, according to Luther, a better understanding of the Gospel must lead the church to respect the Law. That is why he ordered the Law before the Gospel because only through the salvation that Christians received from Christ that they will understand the function of Law. An important note to make is that if one cannot explain the difference between the Law and Gospel, then the mission of the church to bring the Good News to this world will not be successful. Luther famously states that only a real theologian will be able to explain the contrast between the Law and Gospel; this is a challenge that the church must take to be faithful to their calling.

Luther learned about the importance of Law during the year of the 1520s when the Lutheran movement was almost des-

¹⁴ Martin Luther, *Thirty Four Sermons of Dr. Martin Luther*, trans. William Gace (Dublin: S. Powell, 1747).

¹⁵ Witte Jhon, Jr., *Law and Protestantism: The Legal Teachings of the Lutheran Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 1.

¹⁶ Jhon, Jr., 3.

troyed. Luther started to realize that “Law was not just a necessary evil but an essential blessing in this earthly life.”¹⁷ Luther moved forward from Gospel to the acknowledgment that the Law is also required. Critiques stated that by doing so, Luther was going against his original protest towards the Catholic Church. In his defends, this new assertion of the Law shows to the followers of Christ that reformation does not mean changing everything in the church but can also mean looking and understanding the church’s traditions differently. The Law existed in the church, with reformation the Law was critiqued, but that did not mean that the church did not need the Law; it only meant that the church needed to see the Law with different eyes.

Furthermore, Luther developed his ideas about the two kingdoms or realms to explain the need for the order of Law and Gospel in the church. “God has ordained two kingdoms or realms in which humanity is destined to live, Luther argued: the earthly kingdom and the heavenly kingdom.”¹⁸ A Christian is a member of both kingdoms, earthly kingdom that operates with Law, and the heavenly kingdom that is guided with the Gospel. “As a heavenly citizen, the Christian remains free in his or her cons-

science, called to live fully by the light of the Word of God. But as an earthly citizen, the Christian is bound by Law, and called to obey the natural orders and offices that God has ordained and maintained for the governance of this earthly kingdom.”¹⁹ Earthly kingdom and heavenly kingdom have different functions but cannot be separated, just like Law and Gospel have different roles and should not be separated. Hence, by acknowledging that Law and Gospel are parts the kingdoms, Luther made it possible to discern the concept of Law as a wholly theological thought as opposed to the common Law.

By differentiating between what God asks Christians to do as Law and what God gives to them as Gospel, Luther also marks the difference between the creation and the Creator. The Creator exists not only in the Gospel but throughout the Bible, even before the process of creation. The ability to acknowledge the difference between the creation and the Creator is the same ability that the church needs to understand the different functions of the Law and Gospel. When Adam and Eve fell into sin in the story of creation, the relationship between the creation and the Creator was destroyed. The Adamic fall does not mean that the Creator

¹⁷ Jhon, Jr., 4.

¹⁸ Jhon, Jr., 5.

¹⁹ Jhon, Jr., 5-6.

is absent in the life of the creation after sin. Hence, the Creator is present through and in the form of authority in the earthly kingdom as the hidden God. Just like the creation that cannot be separated from the Creator, Christians cannot think of the different role of Law and Gospel as the reason to separate the two concepts. The Law lost its meaning without the Gospel, just like the creation could lose its meaning without the Creator.

Barth: Gospel and Law

Barth is one of the leading theologians of the twentieth century, who is most known for his work in the “Church Dogmatics.” According to John D. Godsey, in “Karl Barth Table Talk,” “the ‘Church Dogmatics’ is not a system conforming to the dictates of human reason, but it is a bold yet humble attempt to write a systematic theology that conforms to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ.”²⁰ For Barth, theology should focus on the incarnation of Jesus Christ as proclaimed in the Gospel. The Gospel should come before the Law because Jesus Christ is the basic for the existence of the Law; hence the basic of the existence of the church and the reason for church’s mission and proclamation in the world. A Christocentric theology according to Barth is not merely a

revelation of the Son of God, but “the revelation of the triune God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”²¹ To repeat, Barth’s theology begins with God who revealed God-self into human experience and not with human’s experience in receiving God’s commands. “Man can know God only because God makes Himself known to man.”²² God makes God-self known to human experience through the revealed Word, the historical event of Jesus Christ. Since Jesus Christ is the revealed Word, He must be given priority above the ‘written Word’ and the ‘preached word.’²³ In short, the incarnation of Jesus Christ should be the starting point of the understanding of the Law.

“Election means reconciliation. Thus, it is not abstractly grounded in the usual omnipotence of God, but in Jesus Christ Himself, the gracious revelation of God’s love.”²⁴ The election of God follows a particular order: the election of Jesus Christ, the election of the community, the election of the individual.²⁵ The Gospel is the news about the election of God in and through Jesus Christ. When the church is elected, they are at the same time are called to do God’s commands (Law). Therefore, Barth classifies doctrines as the ethics of Christian life. “Election and command belong inex-

²⁰ Karl Barth, *Karl Barth’s Table Talk*, ed. John D. Godsey (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1963), 1.

²¹ Barth, 4.

²² Barth.

²³ Barth, 5.

²⁴ Barth, 6.

²⁵ Barth.

trically together,”²⁶ just as Gospel and Law belong together and must be viewed in that order. For Barth, in Christian theological thinking “it is of critical importance that we always move from Gospel to Law, just as we must go from justification to sanctification, from faith to works, from church to state.”²⁷ In brief, the Law is nothing but another form of Gospel. Both the Gospel and Law exist only in the relation with the Word of God.

Barth refuses Luther’s formula of ‘Law and Gospel’ because he believed that the relation between Law and Gospel could only be rational if “that formula, which has almost come to be taken for granted, is reversed to read: Gospel and Law.”²⁸ Barth was not convinced that the inability to distinguish between the Gospel and Law is crucial to the understanding of the Word of God. On the contrary, the Law should be understood as a form of Gospel in itself to understand the Word of God as it has been revealed through Jesus Christ. For Barth, to think of the Gospel and Law as different but inseparable concepts is useless, especially in the process of understanding the Word of God.

Eberhard Jüngel in observing the difference between the ‘Law and Gospel’

for Luther and the ‘Gospel and Law’ for Barth states that:

Barth does appeal to Luther for his doctrine of the three forms of the Word of God, but not Luther’s distinction between Law and Gospel. For Luther, there are two modes of the Word of God, opposing and antagonizing each other in this world. They can attain unity only in God and a most dialectical unity at that. For Barth, there are three forms of the Word of God, each corresponding to the others and expressing the same activity of God in a differentiation based on economy of salvation. And, once he differentiates between them, Barth expressly returns to the theme of their unity once again.²⁹

Barth focuses on the relationship between the Gospel and Law while arguing that God who revealed God-self through the Word, the incarnation of Christ, is the reason why the Law can be recognized as a part of the Gospel. Without the good news of the Gospel, the Law cannot be comprehended in the theological framework. The Law, as Luther understood it as the command of God for human, is seen by Barth as the ethics of Christian life that cannot be separated from dogmatics.

Barth understood ethics as the command of God. “By subsuming ethics (the

²⁶ Barth.

²⁷ Barth, 7.

²⁸ Eberhard Jüngel, *Karl Barth, a Theological Legacy*, ed. Garret E. Paul (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1986), 105.

²⁹ Jüngel, 110.

command of God) under dogmatics, Barth indicates that the question posed by the Law, ‘What should we do?’ Presupposes the dogmatic question of God’s existence and activity. But we can know God’s existence and activity only from the Word of God as Gospel.”³⁰ Thus, the Law of God can only exist within the Gospel of God. By revealing God-self in the mode of human being through the process of incarnation, God proves His willingness to be responsible to humankind. It is through this revelation that God lays the foundation of the Law.

Barth believes that the most important task that the church must take is *to do* theology to know God.³¹ Ingolf L. Dalferth, in “Karl Barth: Centenary Essays,” addressed Barth’s methodology in ontological, semantical, and epistemological analysis and concluded that Barth is an eschatologist realist. Dalferth states that “in theology, we have to start from what *is* and try to understand *how it can be as it is*, and not from a transcendental analysis of what for us can be. It is the methodological procedures of scientific inquiry, not of philosophical reflection, which Barth accepts as his model for theological method.”³² In brief, Barth’s metho-

dology can be seen as focusing on the world of nature and developing explanation based on evidence that he found on the observation of the world. Dalferth named Barth’s methodology as ‘interiorisation.’³³ By interiorisation, he meant that “Barth takes neither a simple theological nor a twofold theological and philosophical approach. But a twofold theological approach to the problem of external perspective.”³⁴ To conclude, Barth’s theological approach is marked with the Gospel as the central component that is supported by the interpretative element, which is the Law.

Based on the discussion above, the relation between the approach presented by Luther and Barth is clear. For Luther, Law as the starting point and the Gospel as the ending point in the life of the church play several vital roles. First, it emphasizes the function of the Christian community, which can only achieve its mission through the proper understanding of the Law. Second, as the source of Christian faith, the Gospel is practiced through the understanding of salvation as it is acknowledged in the Law. Law and Gospel are different but not separated in the life of the Christian community,

³⁰ Jungel, 111.

³¹ Ingolf U. Dalferth, “Karl Barth’s Eschatological Realism,” in *Karl Barth: Centenary Essays*, ed. S. W. Sykes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 14.

³² Dalferth, 19.

³³ Dalferth, 34.

³⁴ Dalferth.

just like creations cannot be separated from the Creator. Following the Law through faith that arises from the Gospel will lead the Christian community into fulfilling the church's mission: to bring the Good News to this world—putting the Gospel after the Law does not make it secondary in Luther's understanding of Christian life. Both Law and the Gospel are equal as an ethical calling for all Christians. The same idea can be found in Barth's explanation of the Gospel and Law. Both the Gospel and Law are essential and inseparable in developing the quality of life of the Christian community. For Barth, the Gospel comes before the Law because Jesus Christ is the basis for the existence of the Law; the church only exists through Christ. Barth begins with the revelation of God and moves to human experience.

Dalferth agrees with Barth while identifying Barth's method of explaining what it is before and how can be as it is. Jüngel observes Luther's Law and Gospel, and Barth's Gospel and Law sees the connection between the approaches. Even though it is clear that Luther's and Barth's starting points are different because of their different emphasis on values, be it Law or the Gospel, both see it as an inseparable unity that must be pursued as an entity. In agreement with Jüngel, I see that the relation bet-

ween Luther and Barth's idea of Law and Gospel and Gospel and Law must always be seen as a continuous dialectical unity where the Gospel as the source of Christian faith is practices through the understanding of salvation as it is acknowledged in the Law; where God who revealed God-self into human experience is known and praise through human's experience in receiving God's commands; where Law and Gospel are equal as an ethical calling for all Christians who are called to live transforming life.

Trans(forming) the Church: 'Law and Gospel' with 'Gospel and Law'

By trans(forming) I meant transformation and formation of the theology of pilgrimage (*theologia viatorum*) and its role in the development of church's mission. As I have mentioned in the beginning of this article, the church today is struggling with complicated problems of violence, injustice, illness, separation, hates, secularism, etc, and to become the living church, Christians must answer the question of "How should they act accordingly as the church of God in the middle of all these endeavors?" The ability to hold both the concept of 'Law and Gospel' with 'Gospel and Law,' hand in hand, might provide advantages for the church and its mission in the world. From Luther, the church carried the sense of responsibility to do God's commands as the

receiver of God's love while from Barth the church learned the sense of unity in and through the Gospel. In an attempt of transforming and forming *theologia viatorum* of the church, the ability to hold hand in hand (*manus in manu*) the duty to God, as proposed by Luther, and receiving the good news (as suggested by Barth) could enable the church to serve the world better.

To refrain from an allegation of heresy, in this article, by mixing two different theological concepts, I must make clear that I am not arguing for the mixing ideas of Luther and Barth. Thus, both Luther and Barth are theologians whose ideas can be reinterpret and restructure for the development of the church. I think holding both understandings of 'Law and Gospel' with 'Gospel and Law' hand in hand should be understood in terms of dialectical instead of analogical. One way to serve the helpless world that we are living today is not by comparing one theology to the other, but to look for the best way in each and every theology, and to developed relation between the concepts to help the church to move forward.

I John Hesselink in comparing Barth and Luther's theology states that "Barth's reversal of the Law-Gospel order is not sim-

ply a rejection of the traditional ordering ... Rather, a careful scrutiny of Barth's use of these terms reveals a radically new understanding of both the Law and the Gospel."³⁵ Just like when Luther's reformation come out, on the one hand, it creates a schism in the body of the established church, but on the other hand, it also brings reformation and the much-needed change in the church. Barth's approach can be seen in a dialectical relation with Luther's approach. The movement from the Law to Gospel to the Gospel to Law, from Luther to Barth can be seen as a dialectical movement if we think of it as the movement from the Law of creation to the Gospel as the gracious Law of God.

Furthermore, using the eschatological understanding as the foundation to understand the concept of the Law and Gospel, Ingolf L. Dalferth praised Luther as the one who presents "such a universal and all-comprehensive but strictly Christological theology."³⁶ Dalferth believes that in the concept of the Law and Gospel, Luther was offering "a distinctive *theological* approach to philosophy, science and history by dividing all human knowledge into knowledge of God, world and human existence *extra Christum* and *in Christo*."³⁷ In short, Luther has successfully differentiated between theo-

³⁵ I. John Hesselink, "Law and Gospel or Gospel and Law? Karl Barth, Martin Luther, and John Calvin," *A Quarterly Journal for Church Renewal* 14 (2005).

³⁶ Ingolf U. Dalferth, *Theology and Philosophy* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001), 76.

³⁷ Dalferth.

logy and philosophy by putting the Law in the theological realm in its relation to the Gospel. By putting the Law before the Gospel, Luther is acknowledging the hidden God who is presented in nature. As Dalferth stated “(God) is not a natural phenomenon, nor the totality of natural phenomena, but invisibly present in them. It grounds everything that exists *coram mundo* but is not one of the things that exist *coram mundo*.”³⁸

Christians learn about the fall at the beginning of the Bible and then move forward to the story of salvation as being presented through the revelation of the Word of Christ. In brief, the differentiation of the Law and Gospel is much easier to understand if we put in the frame of eschatological approach, where we are sinners who are saved and called to be the doers of God’s commands. In this approach, an example of putting hand in hand, Luther’s and Barth understanding become real.

Luther differentiates between the role of the creation and the Creator in the concept of the Law and Gospel.³⁹ “The opposition between theology and philosophy becomes an opposition within theology worked out in terms of the dialectics of Law and Gospel. This is what makes Luther’s

theology so powerful.”⁴⁰ Luther’s theology makes it possible for the internalization of the external aspects while making it possible for God’s kingdom to exist in the world. Luther makes it possible for us to think of different entities in relation with each other and not just opposing each other, by putting both realms in the world that God created.

Furthermore, the two perspectives as can be seen in Luther’s concept of the Law and Gospel is dialectically related. This means that “because everything is placed in both of them, there exist two descriptions for everything: Law-description of God (*deus absconditus*), world (fallen creation) and human existence (sinner), and Gospel-descriptions of God (*deus revelatus*), world (creation and new creation) and human existence (saved sinner).”⁴¹ In the relation between Law and Gospel, the perspective of the Gospel is superior to the perspective of Law because it is only through the Gospel that one will know God.

Theology of the Living Church

In the frame of *manus in manu* of the ‘Law and Gospel’ with the ‘Gospel and Law,’ I am reminded by what Dalferth states in his book “Radical Theology.” He mentioned that “anyone who does not under-

³⁸ Dalferth, 78.

³⁹ Dalferth, 79.

⁴⁰ Dalferth, 83.

⁴¹ Dalferth, 87.

stand things in repeatedly new ways actually understands little at all.”⁴² As an attempt to understand things in new ways I venture to explore the relation between the ability to put hand in hand Luther’s and Barth’s approaches for the development of church’s mission. The remaining question now is “How can the ability of holding hand in hand, both Luther and Barth approach, helps the church in their mission in the world?”

First of all, we must remember that the ‘church’ in itself can be understood differently according to Luther and Barth. Just as Luther and Barth differentiate their opinion on the Law and Gospel and its order; in the discussion of what is a church, they also have different ways of understanding. Luther believes in the visible and invisible church that exists in dialectical relation to each other in the world; while Barth believes that there is only one visible church. In the world, the church is called to be visible in the world, hence acknowledging the invisibility of the church means underestimating the role of the church where the Gospel was proclaimed.

On the one hand, Barth in “Dogmatics in Outline” states that:

By men assembling here and there in the Holy Spirit there arises here and there a visible Christian congregation. It is best not to apply the idea of invisibility to the Church; we are all inclined to slip away with that in the direction of a *civitas platonica* or some sort of Cloud-cuckooland, in which the Christians are united inwardly and invisibly, while the visible Church is devalued ... The first congregation was a visible group, which caused a visible public uproar. If the Church has not this visibility, then it is not the Church. Off course each of these congregations has its problems, such as the congregation of Rome, of Jerusalem, etc. The New Testament never presents the Church apart from these problems.⁴³

Barth believes that the acknowledgment of the invisible church makes the church lost its spirit in spreading the Gospel. On the other hand, Luther’s teaching of the invisible and visible church was founded in the understanding that not all who are part of the church will receive salvation. Thus, salvation from Christ is given for those who have true faith in God. Barth understood the visible church as a unity of the church and not just as the existence of different church’s buildings. The visible church for Barth goes beyond various denominations of churches; it is the one united church that is called by God who revealed God-self to the church.

⁴² Ingolf U. Dalferth, *Radical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016), 164.

⁴³ Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, trans. G. T. Thomson (New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1949), 142.

Hermeneutics teach that the struggle to reinterpret is one of the benefits that theology provides. Dalferth in radical theology argues that the ability to reinterpret “allow us to think of radical discontinuities between the old life and the new. It is not dialectic, but paradox.”⁴⁴ The paradox between the ‘Law and Gospel’ and the ‘Gospel and Law,’ should not be the reason for scape-goating; on the contrary, it should open the possibility of interpreting the two concepts in a new way: in relation to each other. In fact, the development of the church and the church’s mission depends on the ability of its members to find new ways of interpretation. This is one of the characteristics of the living church because the living church experiences God who revealed God-self through interpretation and reinterpretation. A living church is a church that has strong fellowship with Christ as the source of life for the church. A church detached from Christ will die and be unable to fulfil its mission to proclaim the good news to all people. Hence, to achieve its calling and ethical function, living church members must be able to interpret their experiences of the revealed God in their daily lives, activities, and struggles.

⁴⁴ Dalferth, *Radical Theology*, 170.

⁴⁵ Peter J. Paris, “The Church’s Prophetic Vocation: Insight from Karl Barth and Martin Luther King Jr,” in *Karl Barth and the Making of Evangelical Theology*, ed. Clifford B. Anderson and Bruce L.

The living church has the vocation to be the church of God, as Barth says it:

... But this is directly linked with the fact that none of them has received his task from other men or from human society, but each has received it from God ... He makes His cause theirs, and therefore He makes their cause His ... He Himself legitimates, authorizes, instructs, and nourishes them ... The task does not arise out of the men themselves. It comes wholly and most astonishingly upon them to be taken up and fulfilled by them (CD IV/3/2. Pp. 573-75).⁴⁵

The living churches that do theology understand that God who reveals God-self to the creation commanded the church to be the *doer* in the world. In radical theology, the living church is seen in the relationship with God, as in the relationship between the creation and the Creator. The living church is the church that prays and also responsible to God.

Luther mentioned that to become the living church is not easy. He suggested John 4:14 to illustrate the life of a living church as a “living spring of water on its way to eternal life.”⁴⁶ Luther advised Christians of their roles as both subject to none and subject to all; as free and dutiful. Again, Luther proposed seemingly contra-

McCormack (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015), 206.

⁴⁶ Martin Luther, *Martin Luther, Selections from His Writings*, ed. John Dillenberger (Chicago: Quadrangle Books Inc., 1961), 51-52.

dicting but equivalent ideas that he believed matched together if we understand the purpose of our existence in this world.⁴⁷ Christians are the member of the dual kingdoms of earth and heaven, they are sinners and simultaneously saints, they are called to do the Law and receive the Gospel, they are free but also dutiful. Above all, Luther states that a church that lives their faith in God should never forget the only necessary thing in their life that will enable them to become the living church: the Gospel of Christ. The living church is Christ's faithful church, which serves and loves its neighbors because of God. The living church is needed today in a world that is experiencing illness, pain, violence, hate, schism, and many other struggles.

CONCLUSION

Through four parts of the examination, I suggest that the relation between Luther and Barth's idea of Law and Gospel and Gospel and Law must always be seen as a continuous dialectical unity where the Gospel as the source of Christian faith is practices through the understanding of salvation as it is acknowledged in the Law; where God who revealed God-self into human experience is known and praise through human's experience in receiving God's

commands; where Law and Gospel are equal as an ethical calling for all Christians who are called to live transforming life. Holding both understandings of 'Law and Gospel' with 'Gospel and Law' hand in hand should be understood in terms of a continuous dialectical unity. One way to serve the helpless world we live in today is not by comparing one theology to the other but by looking for the best way in each and every theology and developing a relation between the concepts to help the church move forward.

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⁴⁷ Luther, 53.

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